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ABSTRACT

The three sections of this report on primary education in the United Kingdom provide basic information, discuss problems and trends, and describe recent studies of primary education. After a list of the aims of primary education, section one briefly discusses (1) differences in the educational systems of England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; (2) links between preschool and primary education and between primary and lower secondary education; (3) the number of primary school pupils and teachers; (4) grouping of pupils and official class sizes; (5) lengths of the primary phase of education, and the school day, week, and year; (6) major areas of the curriculum; (7) methods of pupil assessment; (8) teacher education; (9) available support services; and (10) institutional links between primary school, parents, and community. Section 2 notes the decrease in the number of teachers; the need for teachers with varied curricular expertise; and interest in issues of management, leadership, and curriculum planning. Also mentioned are teaching of science, environmental studies, and art and craft work, and the need to provide for an increasing number of 4-year-old children. Annotated citations of seven recent studies of primary education are provided in section 3. (RH)

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Project No. 8:
"Innovation in primary education"

Primary education in the United Kingdom

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Strasbourg 1988

Strasbourg, 10 June 1988 DECS/EGT (87) 4 rev.

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Project No. 8 on

"Innovation in primary education"

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Report submitted by

Department of Education and Science
London
United Kingdom

17.508
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Section 1: Basic information

i. The aims of primary education

The fundamental aim that primary schools should meet the educational needs of every pupil is embodied in the 1944 Education Act's reference to the duty to secure education suited to each pupil's age, ability and aptitude. It is widely accepted that primary education should be concerned with the following broad educational aims:

a. to help pupils to develop lively enquiring minds, the ability to question and argue rationally and to apply themselves to tasks and physical skills

b. to help pupils to acquire understanding, knowledge and skills relevant to a fast changing world

c. to help pupils to use language and number effectively

d. to help pupils to develop personal moral values, respect for religious values, and tolerance of other races, religions, and ways of life

e. to help pupils to understand the world in which they live, and the inter-dependence of individuals, groups and nations

f. to help pupils to appreciate human achievements and aspirations.

ii. The responsibility for the organisation of primary education

The following paragraphs show some of the variations in the education system in the United Kingdom.

England and Wales

The education service is distinctive in its distribution of responsibility between central government, local government and the teaching profession. The instrument of central government is the Department of Education and Science, at the head of which is the Secretary of State for Education and Science. He or she is a member of the government of the day and has overall responsibility for education in England and for universities throughout England, Wales and Scotland. The Secretary of State is usually assisted by several ministers. Responsibility for schools and non-university education in Wales rests with the Secretary of State for Wales who is a member of the United Kingdom Cabinet and it is exercised through the Welsh Office.

The Department and the Welsh office are concerned almost entirely with the formation of national policies for education. They are responsible for controlling educational buildings and the supply, training and pensions of teachers, but they do not lay down schools' detailed schemes of work nor do they run the schools and colleges.

Local government administers education through the local education authorities, of which there are 105 in England and Wales. These are responsible for over 89% of national spending on education. Some 46% of their education expenditure they receive directly from central government, but the remainder they raise from the rates (local taxes). The local education authorities administer the routine working of the education service, it being their duty to provide and run the schools and colleges in their areas and to employ teaching and ancillary staff. A chief education officer is in charge of each local education authority's administration and he or she is assisted by professional and administrative staff.

The 1988 Education Reform Bill proposes that there will be a national curriculum in contrast with the present situation whereby the control of the secular curriculum rests with the local authority, or in the case of voluntary and independent schools with the school governors or providing body, but the detail of the work, the choice of text books and the planning of the time-table is usually left to the head of the school with the methods of day-to-day teaching being decided by the individual teacher. In effect, at present, what is taught within schools depends on the partnership of the local authorities, the head and the teachers, and the governing body.

The Education Reform Bill specifies certain common curriculum elements to be offered to pupils of compulsory school age by maintained schools. These elements are the core subjects of mathematics, English and science the other foundation subjects of history, geography, technology, music, art, physical education and (for secondary pupils) a modern foreign language and in Wales, Welsh will be a core subject in Welsh-speaking schools and a foundation subject in the other schools. The Bill will have other far-reaching effects for example, each local eduction authority will be required to submit to the Secretary of State a scheme for allocating their aggregated schools expenditure between all the schools they maintain. The schemes must include details of the authority's arrangements for delegating to governing bodies of all secondary schools and primary schools with more than 200 pupils responsibility for managing their school's budget. The governing bodies of schools with delegated budgets will be responsible for deciding, within the total resources available to them, how many teachers and non-teaching members of staff the school will have. Governing bodies will have greatly increased powers in respect of appointing and dismissing staff. It is also proposed that, following a ballot of parents, the governing body of large schools may apply for grant-maintained status and, to that extent break away from the local education authority. By these and other measures within the Bill, the Government intends to increase parental involvement in the schools and, through competition, introduce a new dynamic into the schools system.

The structure of the education system in Wales is identical with that in England. The existence of the Welsh language however, spoken by about one fifth of the total population and by about one seventh of pupils in primary schools, means that Welsh is used as the sole or main medium of instruction in 355 primary schools, partly as a medium in a further 242 schools, and as a second language in a further 779 schools.

Scotland

Public sector education in Scotland is a partnership between 12 regional and island councils and central government. The Secretary of State for Scotland is a member of the Cabinet and is responsible to Parliament for central government policy on a wide range of issues, including the overall supervision and development of the education service through the Scottish Education Department.

The elected regional and islands councils have a statutory duty to ensure that there is an adequate and efficient provision of schools and further education in their areas, and for this purpose are known as education authorities. They are responsible for the construction of buildings, the employment of teachers and other staff, and the provision of equipment and materials. Their responsibility for the curriculum taught in schools is normally delegated to individual head teachers guidance is however issued from time to time by the Secretary of State on the advice of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum [CCC].

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a four-tier arrangement of educational administration. The tiers are the schools with their boards of governors and principals, responsible for the day-to-day operations the five education and library boards funded by the Department and responsible for the administration of the service in their respective geographical areas; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools which has responsibility for all maintained schools under Roman Catholic management; and the Department of Education, accountable to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is a member of the United Kingdom Cabinet and is responsible for Parliament.

iii. The links between pre-school and primary education and between primary and lower secondary education

In the United Kingdom compulsory schooling begins at five years of age. Before this there is a variety of pre-school provision and an increasing number of children receive nursery education either in a nursery school or in a nursery class in a primary school. The links between pre-school and the primary stage vary from school to school. Frequently the nursery teachers and the primary teachers meet to discuss curricular objectives and continuity between the two stages the needs of individual children are discussed, and assessment and record cards are sent on to the primary school. At the time of transfer parents of nursery children are encouraged to visit the primary school, the head talks to them about the work of the school and they usually have an opportunity to talk to the head individually. There is other pre-school provision which is voluntary but this does not have the close links outlined above. It is often the case that a large number of primary schools "feed" one secondary school. The majority of local authorities require the primary school to pass on a record card for each pupil apart from this the links established vary considerably from one group of schools to another. Most schools organise a range of contacts in the summer term heads of primary schools and heads of first year in secondary school meet and discuss pupils' abilities and prospects parents visit the secondary schools and pupils visit their new school - usually for half a day.

iv. The number of primary school pupils and teachers

In the school year 1985-86 there were about 4.5 million pupils of compulsory school age in maintained primary schools in the United Kingdom. In 1985-86 there were approximately 205,800 teachers involved with this phase of education.

v. The arrangements for grouping pupils and the official class sizes

In most cases primary school classes have a wide ability range and the learning takes place in these mixed ability groups though in England frequently there is a regrouping by ability for the ten and eleven year olds for the teaching of mathematics.

Information on the distribution of primary pupils by size of class is not readily available for the United Kingdom as a whole. The table below shows the percentages of primary school pupils in five categories of class size in England, Scotland and in Northern Ireland,

	Class size					
	10 or under	11-20	21-30	31-40	41 or over	Total
England percentages (1985-86 data)	0.9	9.2	65.1	24.6	0.2	100
Scotland percentages (1984-85 data)	0.4	10.1	71.4	17.9	0.2	100
Northern Ireland percentages (1986-87)		15.8	62.0	22.0	0.2	100

vi. The length of the primary phase, the school day, the school week and the school year.

Most children in England and Wales spend between six and seven years in the primary phase of education variations occur because children are first admitted to school at different times to the academic year according to their birthday. At present about half of all the first entrants are less than 4 years 9 months and many are just 4 years old. The primary phase is often sub-divided: first an infant department/school followed by a four-year junior department/school with transfer when the children are eleven. However, a minority of education authorities follow a slightly different pattern of "first" schools for the age group five to eight or five to nine, followed by four-year "middle" schools for the eight to twelve or nine to thirteen year age group.

In Scotland, education authorities are free to adopt more than one intake of children per school year. However, the practice has been to arrange for a single intake of children between the ages of four and a half and five and a half years. Transfer to secondary education takes place between the ages of eleven and a half and twelve and a half after a seven year primary course.

Because of the high degree of independence given to local authorities for the administration of schools, there are very few common rules for the organisation of the school day and week and for the quantity of teaching to be given. For children under eight years of age, three hours of instruction per day are prescribed pupils of eight years and over are offered at least four hours. This teaching has to be divided into morning and afternoon sessions unless exceptional circumstances make this undesirable.

Most of the United Kingdom schools teach five days per week in morning and afternoon sessions. If a school meets on six days in the week, as is the case for many independent and boarding schools, one day may consist of one session only.

There is only a very limited number of administrative regulations for the organisation of the school year. The regulations simply state that maintained schools must meet for no less than 400 sessions per year from which may be deducted not more than 20 sessions for closures during the educational year. Since one session in the United Kingdom educational system corresponds roughly to a half day, the minimum number of teaching days per year is about 190. In practice, many schools still follow the "term" system, allowing two weeks holiday at the end of the first term (Christmas), between two and three weeks at the end of the second term (usually around Easter) and some six weeks at the end of the school year which normally closes in the second half of July.

In Scotland education authorities are required to arrange that the schools under their management be open for a minimum of 190 days (excluding Saturdays and Sundays) in each school year. Individual authorities can make application to the Secretary of State for Scotland for his consent to a reduction in the number of openings.

vii. <u>The major areas of the primary school curriculum</u>

Primary schools give high priority to English and mathematics. In Wales many schools give high priority to Welsh and in Scotland provision is made for the teaching of Gaelic in some areas of the country, beyond this the curriculum encourages children to develop an understanding of the world, of their place in it and of how people live and work. This involves an introduction to some of the many ideas derived from historical, geographical, health related, scientific and technological issues. Time is

given to aesthetic and practical subjects such as art and craft, physical education and both instrumental and vocal music, and to religious education. In most schools children are introduced to using a computer.

Finally, schools are concerned with the personal and social development of their pupils in the widest sense of the children's awareness of themselves as individuals and the way they relate to others in the context of the culturally and racially diverse society of Britain today and of the European Communities.

viii. The main methods of pupil assessment

In most classes teachers keep records of their pupils' attainment in numeracy and literacy. Many education authorities now test all children in these two major aspects of the curriculum and in verbal and non-verbal reasoning, in some cases twice or three times during the primary phase. Most schools are required to complete a record card for each pupil showing the results of such tests, relevant facts to do with the health of the child and broad comment about attainment, interests and general attitudes to work. These records are passed on from school to school in some cases they are supplemented by samples of the pupils' written and graphic work.

In 1974 an Assessment of Performance Unit (England and Wales) was set up within the part of the Department of Education and Science concerned with curriculum and examinations to promote the development of assessing and monitoring the achievement of children in schools and to seek to identify the incidence of under-achievement. It has published reports on pupils' performance in England and mathematics at eleven and fifteen and in science at eleven, thirteen and fifteen. In these subjects the Assessment of Performance Unit reports are helping to build up a national picture of achieved educational standards and are providing valuable information on curriculum and assessment which can be used on a variety of in-service courses for teachers.

In Scotland, the Assessment of Achievement Programme was started in 1982 to assess pupils' performance in selected areas of the curriculum. Mathematics was tested in 1983 at P4 and P7 as was English in 1984, and science at these stages in 1987. The results from the testing of mathematics have been circulated to all schools in Scotland in the forms of folders containing sets of cards. Booklets for teachers giving the findings from the English project are in preparation. It is planned to retest in each of the main subject areas after five years in order to provide an up-to-date picture of what Scottish pupils know and can do.

The Education Reform Bill (1988) specifies common curriculum elements [see the references under the heading 'the responsibility for the organisation of primary education'] and proposes to establish attainment targets and programmes of study. It is also proposed that arrangements shall be made for assessment, to be specified as appropriate, at four key ages, 7, 11, 14, 16.]

ix. Arrangements for the initial and in-service training of primary school teachers

There are two main forms of initial training for teachers in primary schools in England and Wales. Those who hold a degree, following a three-year course in a university or institution of higher education, can take a one-year Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in an approved institution, normally a university, college of higher education or polytechnic. The main route into primary teaching is a four-year course leading to the degree of bachelor of education. Most bachelor of education (B Ed) degrees combine one or more academic subjects with professional and educational studies in a concurrent programme and courses must meet the criteria set down by the Secretary of State. In total, primary training provided about 13,750 primary teachers in the year 1986-87, a minority by the PGCE route and the majority by the B Ed route. There is mounting pressure to extend the length of the PGCE course.

In Scotland there are two forms of initial training for teachers in the primary sector. Those who hold a degree of a UK university (including the Open University) or of the Council for National Academic Awards or a qualification of equivalent standard can take a one-year postgraduate course in a college of education. Alternatively students may take a four-year course in a college of education leading to the Bachelor of Education degree which replaced the three-year college of education course leading to a diploma in primary education.

Opportunities for in-service training for primary teachers vary widely in nature and content. In the past four years the government has provided educational support grants for developments in inner urban areas and in rural areas and to encourage higher standards of achievement in mathematics and science. Most local education authorities offer a programme of short courses through their own advisory services these range from courses for newly trained teachers to advanced training for experienced teachers and heads. Universities, colleges and polytechnics offer courses leading to the award of certificates, diplomas and masters degrees covering a wide range of subjects and aspects of education. Teacher centres, subject associations

and other agencies provide further opportunities for professional development through courses, conferences and workshops. In England and Wales the government departments, through Her Majesty's Inspectorate, offer a substantial programme of national short courses covering a wide range of subjects each year. In Scotland courses are offered principally by Colleges of Education.

x. The support services which are available to primary schools, eg doctors, psychologists, social workers, advisers.

The 1981 Education Act set a new pattern for the educational provision in respect of children with special educational needs. The particular requirements of individual children are assessed and as far as possible appropriate provision is made within normal school so that these children are taught with their peer group legislation calls for the school's close co-operation with the parents of those children whose educational needs require special help. Schools generally maintain good links with the health services and the school nurse provides a valuable link with the doctor who may visit once or many times a year according to need. Relationships between doctor and school are generally good. Doctors discuss individual children with the head and relevant information is transmitted to the class teacher.

Approximately 1,298 psychologists are employed by local education authorities and are available to the schools and in Scotland there are a further 180. Their duties vary widely but in many cases include the assessment of individual pupils, working with teachers in devising learning programmes, participating in in-service training for teachers and providing guidance and support to children and their parents.

Local education authorities appoint their own officers to ensure that the duty of securing attendance at school is carried out and that children should be able to benefit from such education. The welfare element has long been recognised and these officers are designated education welfare officers, school attendance officers or even, but less commonly, education social workers. Many of these officers are fully qualified social workers. Education welfare officers function in the following principal areas: ensuring school attendance, the provision of free meals, school uniform and clothing in cases of need, provision of maintenance grants where appropriate, non-accidental injury to children of school age, the welfare and transport arrangements for handicapped pupils and the employment of children. In carrying out these functions education welfare officers and heads co-operate with social workers employed by the social services department of the authority and, in some cases, by other agencies.

Each local authority employs educational advisers who inform the Chief Education Officer or Director of Education about resources and the work of the schools. Most advisory services include primary school specialists but the pastoral work of visiting the primary schools is usually shared with subject specialists. The advisers are key figures as they influence and lead the in-service training programme for the teachers, they supervise the work of newly qualified teachers and draw together groups of more experienced teachers and heads to discuss educational methods and curriculum development. In some cases they are involved in appointing teachers, advising on equipment and teaching materials and writing reports on individual schools.

Northern Ireland has a small number of primary advisers in the Education Library Boards. These advisers undertake support work in primary schools but have no responsibility for monitoring of standards. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education is involved in both support and monitoring of all primary schools.

xi. The institutional links between the primary school, parents and the community

The Education Act (1986) increased the influence of parents in the running of their children's schools. In the governing bodies of primary schools there are now an equal number of parents and local authority governors and provision made for representatives from the local business community. All parents receive an annual report from the governing body and have the chance to discuss this at an annual meeting. Many primary schools have parents' associations or parent-teacher associations. Recent research on the important effect parental support may have on pupil performance in, for example, reading skills has further encouraged primary schools to involve parents in the work of the school and there have been many projects to take pupils out into the local community, and to bring members of the local community into schools.

In Scotland the nearest equivalent to governing bodies are the schools councils, provided for in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. Membership of the school councils is at the discretion of the education authorities subject to due representation of parents of the pupils attending the school(s) served by the Council, at least one person interested in the promotion of

religious education and by nomination or appointment, at least one teacher or member of other educational staff. The functions of the school councils are also to a great extent determined by the authorities. The legislation directs the authorities to appoint school councils to discharge, subject to any directions given by them, such functions of management and supervision of educational establishments or groups of educational establishments as the authority shall determine.

In March 1988 proposals were laid before Parliament in the form of the School Boards (Scotland) Bill which will have the effect, when they are implemented of establishing school boards for each primary and secondary school administered by local education authorities in Scotland. When these boards are established, they will replace school councils. The boards will comprise of elected parents, elected teachers and co-opted members of the local community with a majority of parents. Headteachers will not be board members but will advise and liaise with the board. The proposals will give boards basic functions and powers including the right to approve expenditure on books and materials, rights to information from their local education authorities and involvement in senior appointments to the school. Boards will be able to take on additional delegated functions as they develop. Boards will not have the power to control the curriculum or to dismiss staff. It is intended that boards should be operational from the beginning of the 1989/90 school year ie from August 1989.

Section 2: Some problems and trends

Although there has been an "up-turn" in primary pupils' numbers since 1985, a number of matters which give cause for concern arise directly from the interplay of the fall in number of pupils in the years before 1985 and the effects of economic constraint, factors which directly influence the total number of teachers and the supply of equipment and materials. Where schools become smaller this may lead to an increase in the number of mixed age classes. The Inspectorate's national survey of primary schools in England indicated that children in mixed ability classes of 25, or more, did less well in tests of reading and mathematics, and work in other subjects was less well suited to their abilities. A fall in the number of teachers in a school can create difficulty in providing expertise to cover all parts of the curriculum.

In recent years the fall in the overall numbers of teachers brought with it the problems of redeployment, one of which is that a redeployed teacher may not be able to offer the subject strengths required by the school. However, there is evidence that many local education authorities are now giving more attention to the management of aspects of the education service such as policies relating to the curriculum and staffing: the role and function of the local advisers and the matching of teachers' in-service training to the identified needs of the service, the schools and individual teachers. In some cases this is facilitated by centrally provided resources being targeted on specific developments.

These changes, together with the finding of recent surveys and studies, have led towards greater awareness of the need for each school to have a staff of teachers who can offer different curricular strengths and expertise. An associated trend is the increasing attention given to issues of management and leadership and to coherent planning of the curriculum.

In English and mathematics recent major studies have added weight to the evidence that children learn language and mathematical skills most effectively when they recognise the application of these skills to every-day life. There is evidence of renewed interest in the teaching of science and environmental studies in primary schools and the beginning of a sharper awareness that some art and craft work for primary children might be of a simple technological kind aimed at designing and making things that work.

In recent years an increasing number of 4 year old children, some of them only just 4, have been admitted into school and so there is a need to provide appropriately for these young children in terms of resources, teaching approaches and the curriculum offered. In some cases the needs of 4 year olds have received insufficient attention and this has been so particularly where they are in classes together with children of statutory school age.

Section 3: Recent important studies of primary education

i. "Education Observed" a series of booklets written by HM Inspectors of School, Department of Education and Science: from 1984
ISBN 0 85522 141 0

Since January 1983 the Secretary of State for Education and Science has published all the reports made to him by Her Majesty's Inspectors following formal inspections of schools, colleges and other educational provision in England. The "Education Observed" series provides periodic reviews of the reports published so that the general messages and trends emerging from inspections can more readily reach a wider audience.

ii. "Achievement in Primary Schools" Volume 1 of the report presented by the Education, Science and Arts Committee of the House of Commons. Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 1986, 297 pages
ISBN 0 10 011165 3

The report relates to primary education in England. The focal point of the inquiry was to identify those factors which encourage and those which inhibit a child's achievement at primary school. The committee also had regard to the following subjects (not listed in any order or priority).

i. Pre-school education and the links with primary schools.

ii. the effects of falling rolls,

iii. the viability of small schools,

iv. methods of teaching: including remedial teaching,

v. the curriculum: including the role of specialist teaching in providing that curriculum,

vi. the role of parents,

vii. the role of school governors,

viii. comparisons with primary education in some other countries.

iii. "Science: Assessment Framework, Age 11" report No. 4 in a series produced by the Assessment of Performance Unit, Department of Education and Science, DES London 1984, 44 pages
ISBN 0 86357 012 7

The report gives information about what is being assessed in the APU monitoring of science performance at age 11. It begins with a brief summary of the background of the APU surveys and ends with some details concerning the involvement of schools. The main content is the discussion and illustrations, through examples of questions of the categories of performance being tested. [The most recent booklet is No. 8 in the series, it is called "Planning Scientific Investigations at age 11". The APU have produced similar booklets relating to English and to mathematics.]

iv. "Curriculum and Organisation of Primary Schools in Wales". Education Issues 7 in a series written by HMI (Wales) Welsh office. Her Majesty's Stationery office. 1984, 43 pages
ISBN 0 86348 058 6

The report gives a general account of primary education in Wales. it is based on inspections made and reports written by HM Inspectors in recent years. Particular attention is given to a detailed description and assessment of the curriculum and to the factors which affect the quality of provision such as the organisation of the school and of the balance and breadth of the children's learning, the staffing considerations and assessment and recording policies. The problems faced by small rural schools are discussed.

v. "Primary Education in the Eighties" a Committee on Primary Eduction position paper. Edinburgh: 1984, 84 pages
ISBN 0 947942 15 7

This paper makes a large number of recommendations about the form and content of Scottish primary education in five main areas: the

curriculum the responsibilities of teachers: the school community: the school, the teacher and the wider curriculum and staff development.

vi. "Education 10-14 in Scotland" a Consultative Committee on the Curriculum discussion paper. Edinburgh. 1986, 215 pages
ISBN 0 947985 06 9

This report is based on the premise that a young person's education from 10-14 years should be coherent, continuous, progressive and wide-ranging. It analyses why, in the present situation, it is difficult to achieve these ends, discontinuity produced by the move from primary to secondary schools the different assumptions about learning and teaching that can exist, not only between primary and secondary, but between primaries and among the different subject departments of the secondary school, the pressure on the curriculum of new areas of skill and knowledge, as for example, computing, health education, media studies and the lack, especially evidence in the first two years of secondary education, of an adequate overall rationale for this stage of schooling. The report seeks to construct such a rationale and also covers such issues as teaching and assessment, recording and reporting, and the pastoral care of pupils.

vii. "The Quality of Pupil Learning Experiences" by Bennett, Desforges, Cockburn and Wilkinson, 1984, Lawrence Erlbaum associates Ltd, London. 262 pages
ISBN 0 86377 011 8

This book contains the results of a research project conducted in a sample of English primary schools, in which particular attention was paid to the tasks children were assigned, to the degree of match between assigned tasks and pupil attainment, to the detailed observation of children at work, to the breadth, structure and coherence of the language and mathematics curriculum, to the experience of working in groups and the relationship between matching curriculum structure and pupil attainment. The complexity of classroom life is emphasised.